



An Analysis of Mathew's Portrayal of Jesus as "Son of David"

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Introduction

The name Jesus has been identified as the name that most individuals, regardless of their religious affinity, are more familiar. For most of the religions, Jesus is considered as an important figure in their beliefs and practices. Jesus is seen as part of the Trinity in the Christian religion. Though God is seen as the most familiar being in Christianity, the conception of Jesus is well known by all Christians though some distinctions exist on the personality of Jesus as a deity. From the Old Testament, different names are ascribed to God, which includes Jehovah Jireh in Genesis Chapter 2, Jehovah in Exodus 15, and in Micah, God is referred to as Elohim.¹ Some Biblical theologians also believe though the name of Jesus is not emphatically stated in the Old Testament, the usage of "rock" and "the son of man/ a god" in Numbers and Daniel, respectively, might be attributed to Jesus. In the new Testament, Jesus is described with different names, notably, by the Gospel writers. Names such as "Savior, my Lord, the son of man, the son of God, teacher/Rabbi, Son of David, and the Messiah." These are a few of the names of which most of us know, though Jesus is more than any single description. In the first four books of the New Testament, which is referred to as the "Gospel," each of the authors who documents the biography of Jesus provides unique portraits. One of the Christological portraits is the phrase "Son of David," a title that is familiar for the writers of the Old Testament who understood David's kingship lineage. This paper argues that Mathew portrays Jesus as the "Son of David." Though Mathew portrays multiple Christological images, this paper would defend one Christological image that Mathew portrait of Jesus, "Son of David," and defend by making analysis from the instances when Mathew referred to Jesus as the "Son of David."

The Title "SON OF DAVID"

The title "Son of David" from the perspective of various Jewish writers signifies an individual's connection with the great King. He succeeded King Saul in the history of the Israelites. Most Biblical commentators hold the view that the title "Son of David" is a legal title that signifies a relationship with the great King David.² According to most Biblical writers, the Gospel, according to Mathew, has the unique attribute as more Jewish incline among all the gospels. The Gospel of Mathew highlights the genealogy of Jesus in line with the Davidic lineage, possibly to help clarify Jesus' identity as the awaited Messiah.³ David is known as a highly respected King and a charismatic leader. Moreover, he is known as a famous poet through his songs and writings in the Psalms. David is believed to possess the ability to make predictions, something that the prophets were known to exhibit. This is why some scholars assert that Mathew was possibly highlighting when he referred to Jesus as the son of David.⁴ Literary, the usage of the title son of David is also associated with the great King Solomon, who is regarded as the wisest King to have ever lived in human history. Mathew's usage of the title "Son of David" is believed to refer to more than just Jesus's connection with the lineage of King David.⁵ For one to qualify as the promised Messiah, the person must be a Jew and also originate from the royal lineage of King David. Mathew affirms Jesus was a descendant of Abraham and also a descendant of David, the originator of the Israelites' royal dynasty.⁶ Prior to David's emergence as a King, he was a shepherd. Similarly, Jesus is seen as a shepherd who came to the earth to take care of God's people. Hence, Jesus, the son of David, is seen as the Davidic shepherd-king type who heals the sick, blind, lame, and lepers.⁷ Most references in the Gospel, according to Mathew, were in connection with Jesus' healing of the sick or caring for the weak.

¹Thomas L. Constable, "Sonic Light," *Notes on Mathew 2020 Ed.*, Plano Bible Chapel, <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>

²H. Daniel Zacharias, "Introduction." In *Mathew's Presentation of the Son of David: Davidic Tradition and Typology in the Gospel of Mathew*. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 1-28.

³Yigal Levin, "Jesus, 'Son of God' and 'Son of David': The 'Adoption' of Jesus into the Davidic Line." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 28, no. 4 (June 2006): 415-42.

⁴Kim Paffenroth, "Jesus as Anointed and Healing Son of David in the Gospel of Mathew." *Biblical* 80, no. 4 (January 1, 1999), 552.

⁵Levin, "Jesus, 'Son of God' and 'Son of David.'" 415-418.

⁶Constable, "Sonic Light,"

⁷Wayne Baxter, "Healing and the 'Son of David': Mathew's Warrant" in *Novum Testamentum*, Vol. 48 Fasc. 1. (2006), pp. 36-50.

BIBLICAL USAGE OF THE TITLE SON OF DAVID

The Gospel of Mark and Luke made mention of the title in four instances (Mark 10:47-48; Mark 18:38-39; Luke 18:38-39 & Luke 20:41,44).⁸Mark depicts Jesus as someone who practices exorcism, though Mathew presents Him as a healer who delivered individuals from sicknesses that possessed them. Although Mark and Luke present Jesus as a teacher who taught the people after dragging out the merchants from the temple, Mathew omits this aspect of the narrative and only pinpointed the blind and lame who came for healing from Jesus in the temple (Mark 11:1; Luke 19:4; & Matt. 21:14). The Gospel of John never made use of the phrase though he cross-referenced it in John 7:42 when he was describing the origin of the Messiah.⁹Mathew used the name "Son of David" more than all the other writers of the Gospel. In the Gospel, according to Mathew, the author uniquely portrays Jesus as the "Son of David" in reference to the Gospel's Christology. Mathew used the phrase "Son of David" on ten different occasions, with six out of the ten been uniquely used by Mathew, while four were in reference to the other gospel writers to portray the identity of Jesus (Mathew 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 21:9; and 21:15). Mathew begins his writings from the genealogy of Jesus since Christians believed Jesus was the Jewish awaited Messiah promised in the Old Testament.¹⁰From the writings of Mathew, the most outstanding description of Jesus is the fact that He has a connection with the line of King David, a portrait that reveals His royal origin. This portrait also indicates His relationship with Abraham as an Israelite. Moreover, Mathew's description used the title "Son of David" to tell about the anticipated Messiah that the Israelites await to deliver them. Thus, Mathew's understanding and how he presents Jesus the Christ is seen from a Kingship perspective. Mathew opens his writings by introducing the genealogy of Jesus when he indicated from the beginning that "This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham." (Mathew 1:1-17).

Readings from the book of 2 Samuel presents how God sent the Prophet Nathan to David to deliver a message to the King. The message from God that Nathan delivered to David was that the Davidic line would rule a Kingdom whose dominion would never cease (2 Samuel 7:12-16). Following the fall of Jerusalem and the eventual exile of the Israelites to the Babylonian Kingdom, most Israelites were distressed and lost hope in the promised. During the days of Jesus, the promise to David was understood more from a political perspective. The Israelites believed the awaited Messiah would conquer various territories, free the Israelites from all foreign powers, and make Israel become a world power under the leadership of the Messiah as the King. Since Mathew mentioned David before mentioning Abraham, it is obvious he had something to show to his readers than the mere chronological list of Jesus' descendants. Hence, the emphasis on King David.¹¹

THE GOSPEL OF MATHEW USAGE OF THE PHRASE

The Book of Mathew records six unique mentions of the "Son of David" to refer to Jesus. According to Joel Willits, Mathew's Davidic Messiahship is the focal point for understanding the writings in the book of Mathew. To put it another way, the Messianic conception centered on King David is the forge of the Gospel according to Mathew.¹²In each given circumstance, Mathew's reference was connected to a conflict between the Pharisees and Jesus, in reference to blindness, praise from a crowd, or to the genealogy of Jesus.

MATHEW 1:1 – 20.

From the Gospel According to Mathew, Jesus is described with three major phrases as part of the introductory sentence: Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, and the son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1). Mathew was aware of his audience as the Israelites, and in order to promote a deeper understanding, he used the terms "Messiah, the son of David" to enhance a better comprehension of the identity of Jesus, who was to be a King from the line of David. Although some scholars have debated on the audience of the book of Mathew, recent studies have revealed that the audience was individuals whose ancestry practice Judaism and were faced with great opposition from the Judaism leaders as they sought to spread their message to the Gentiles.¹³Jesus is described as the son of Abraham since the history of Israel begins with Abraham, whom God promised to make him the father of many nations. Jesus becomes the son of David because Joseph, His earthly father, by divine ordination, gave Him the name and recognized Him as his son and adopted Him into the Davidic line (Mathew 1:20).¹⁴

MATHEW 9:27.

Again, Mathew records two blind men who called upon Jesus by saying, "Have mercy on us, Son of David! (Matt. 9:27)" If one concludes that the usage of "Son of David" has a connection with the awaited Messiah, and there is an association to the blind or lame, then a reference to 2 Samuel 5:4-10 might highlight something important. In 2 Samuel 5:4-10, the narration indicates that David conquered Jerusalem and named it "the city of David." And it continues that the lame and the blind shall never come into the house. King David's soul hated the lame and blind, and it was decreed that whoever would want to destroy the Jebusites, the natives of the land of Jerusalem, shall destroy the blind and the lame. Therefore, the observers of the incident where the two blind men used the phrase "Son of David" in reference to seeking help from Jesus could understand it as a challenge. Similarly, the witnesses could also perceive it as an acknowledgment of Jesus' rightful position as the "son of David," the awaited Messiah.¹⁵ Ironically, the blind identified Jesus as the "son of David." Jesus listened to their pleas and healed the two blind men (Matt. 9:29-30). Hence, both the blind men

⁸All Biblical references are cited from the New International Version (NIV).

⁹Jack Dean Kingsbury, "The Title "Son of David" in Matthew's Gospel." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95, no. 4 (1976): 591-602. Accessed December 15, 2020. doi:10.2307/3265574.

¹⁰Constable, "Sonic Light,"

¹¹Constable, "Sonic Light,"

¹²Zacharias, "Introduction," 1-8.

¹³Richard Van Egmond, "Jesus, "Son of David" in Mathew's Gospel and The Messianic Background of Early Christology." (Master A Thess., Hamilton, ON., 2004), 188-191.

¹⁴Kingsbury, "The Title "Son of David" in Matthew's Gospel," 594.

¹⁵Terence Y. Mullins. "Jesus, the Son of David." *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Vol.29(1991), 117-126.

and the witnesses might use the healing event as evidence to affirm the Messiahship of Jesus. Mathew's report pinpoints what the Prophet Isaiah indicated that the Messiah would heal the blind and mute (Isaiah 35:5-6). Moreover, the Gospel's report that the two blind men went away and spread the news about Jesus in the entire district reveals they spoke of Jesus as the awaited Messiah (Matt 9:31). After He had healed the two blind men, He went ahead and healed a dumb man in the same region as the man could speak. Following the healing of the dumb man, the Pharisees spoke of Jesus with contempt. They attributed His powers to the prince of demons. (Matt 9:33-34). The Pharisees did this to refute the fact that Jesus was the true Messiah.

MATHEW 12:22 – 24.

The third reference of the usage of the phrase "Son of David" is found in Mathew 12:22-24. The people brought a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute. Jesus healed the man, and he was able to speak and see. At the amazement of the people, they questioned, "Could this be the son of David? (Matt. 12:23)." Jesus' ministry began to witness a turning point as the people started to believe that He was above the normal man they had thought. Here again, the Pharisees tried to deny Jesus the title by asserting that "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons (Matt. 12:24)."¹⁶

MATHEW 15:22 – 31.

In addition, the Gospel According to Mathew made references to Jesus as the "Son of David" in Mathew 15:22-31 when a Canaanite woman referred to Him as the "Son of David." Hitherto, Jesus had angered the Pharisees for describing them as blind guides who were guiding the people. Jesus indicated that if the blind Pharisees are to lead a blind man, both shall fall into a pit (Matt. 12:14). The disciples notified Jesus that the Pharisees were offended with His description of them as blind guides. After this incident, Jesus and His disciples headed to the region of Tyre and Sidon, where a Canaanite woman appealed to Him with a cry to heal her daughter. Though she was not a Jew, she believed Jesus was the awaited Messiah whom the Jews had been waiting to deliver them. Figuratively, one can describe her as blind since she was a Gentile. The Canaanite woman said, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly."¹⁷ Jesus healed the daughter of the woman. Afterward, Jesus left to the mountains using the Sea of Galilee. He met a great multitude who brought to Him the lame, blind, dumb, the maimed, and others. Jesus healed these individuals, and the people continued to praise the God of Israel (Matt. 12:28-30).¹⁸ The phrase "Son of David" is used here again and connected to the Pharisees as blind individuals, and the aftermath was the healing of the lame and the blind.

MATHEW 20:30&MATHEW 21:16

In another instance, when Jesus was embarking on His trip into Jerusalem, two blind men recognized Jesus as the son of David (Matt. 20:30&21:16). After Jesus and His disciples departed from Jericho, a large crowd followed them. There were two blind men on the roadside, and the blind men heard that Jesus was passing. The two blind men continuously shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" Although the people rebuked the blind men, Jesus had compassion on them, and upon asking what they wanted from Him, He touched their eyes, and they immediately received their sight. It is yet to be ascertained whether the people rebuked the blind men for calling Jesus as the Son of David, a description for the awaiting Messiah, or they were rebuked because they were beggars.

MATHEW 21:9.

In Mathew 21:9, the writer of Mathew reveals to readers that not only figuratively blind individuals acknowledged Jesus as the son of David. When Jesus was making His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, He met a large crowd who shouted, "Hosanna to the son of David! (Matt. 21:9)." People used the term Hosanna as a supplication for saving unto God, though here the crowd used it in reference to worship and celebrate Jesus, the Messiah. The crowd that recognized Him as the Messiah, the son of David, was hoping for a conquering Messiah who would emerge as a hero out of His military prowess. Mathew describes Him by referencing the Old Testament usage of "humble King" (Matt. 21:5).¹⁹ The Israelites believed that the Messiah would restore the Kingdom of Israel. To their amazement, He went into the temple in Jerusalem and began to turn tables and dismissed merchants from the temple. The people were disappointed because they thought He had come to establish His kingdom, not to destroy them. Afterward this incident in the temple, they began to chant for His crucifixion. Again, Jesus then went into the temple in Jerusalem and began to heal and cleanse the temple. The blind and lame were brought into the temple, and they received their healing. Conflict arose as the Scribes and the chief priests observed the great works of Jesus, and as the children shouted "Hosanna to the Son of David! (Matt 21:15-16)" This incident was the zenith of the proclamation of Jesus as the Son of David. In Jerusalem, the city of David, Jesus was acclaimed as the "Son of David" in both near and far. Even children used the title "Son of David" to refer to Jesus. Children are described as the ones calling Jesus the son of David (Matt. 21:15). It became apparent that Jesus was the awaited Messiah.

Jesus healed the blind, maimed, dumb, and others. He had cleansed the temple and performed many outstanding signs that signify He was the awaited Messiah, the "Son of David." However, He disapproved of the usage of the phrase "Son of David" as a perfect description of the Messiah. He questioned the Pharisees of whom they think would be the father of the Messiah. The Pharisees replied, "The son of David," since the Jews believed that the Messiah would be a male from King David's descendants.²⁰ Jesus replied by referring to the Old Testament that if David did call the Messiah as his Lord, how could the Messiah be David's son? (Matt 22:41-46).²¹ None of the Pharisees could answer this question since they did not understand that Jesus was truly the awaited Messiah. It becomes a puzzle that Jesus did not refer to Himself as the son of David. After this incident, the Gospel of Mathew never used the title "Son of David" again in his description of Jesus.

¹⁶Constable, "Sonic Light,"

¹⁷Constable, "Sonic Light,"

¹⁸Constable, "Sonic Light,"

¹⁹Kingsbury, "The Title "Son of David" in Matthew's Gospel," 598.

²⁰Constable, "Sonic Light,"

²¹Constable, "Sonic Light,"

ASSESSMENT OF MATHEW'S ACCOUNT OF THE TITLE

Basically, there are three ways to assess Mathew's account on the usage of the title "Son of David." In any given circumstance, the application of the title "Son of David" to Jesus was in reference to Jesus' contact with the lame/blind and when there was a conflict with the Pharisees. Firstly, the arrangement of Mathew's events could be an original configuration, a unique manner that Mathew chose to present his account about the life of Jesus, or he used the title "Son of David" to provide a better understanding to his audience who were Jewish. Mathew's narration places emphasis on the status of both Abraham and David, and he even went ahead to add the number of generations as fourteen-from Abraham to David.²² Therefore, the usage of the title "Son of David" seems to portray a greater significance for the writer of the First Gospel. However, it is doubtful to conclude that the author of Mathew created the title "Son of David" in order to use it for his writings. Mathew never made any observable reference to the report in 2 Samuel 5, though he is reported to have made repeated references to the Old Testament on some occasions to support his writings as a fulfillment of the Old Testament.²³

On the other hand, the constellation used may represent the exact way the events did occur. The readings from the book of 2 Samuel might affirm that for any individual to bear the title "Son of David," he or she must confront both the lame and blind to confirm the title. The lame and blind would demand to be healed by the bearer of the title. Jesus did cure the blind and lame, and that was to have granted Him the title. However, the religious authorities discredit His works. In the incidents when the blind and lame were healed, there was no connection with the genealogy of Jesus.²⁴

Lastly, there is the possibility that the constellation could be connected to the material that Mathew used. An interpreter might ask how the pattern of the first Gospel was developed. As to whether the pattern originated from the works of an earlier source or if it was picked from earlier material, there is a higher probability that the material Mathew had before him probably accounted for the arrangement of the various parts in his Gospel.²⁵

CONCLUSION

There are many Christological portraits in the Gospel, which includes "the son of man, the son of David, the son of God, the word of God, the savior, the Lamb of God, and others." The above discussions have revealed that the Gospel, according to Mathew, uses the description "Son of David" for Jesus and traced His genealogy from the Davidic lineage. Similar to David, who was a shepherd and cared for the sheep, Jesus was a healer who cared for the sick and healed many of them. The "Son of David" as used in the Gospel according to Mathew might be in reference to Jesus' healing traits since Mathew mostly used the title "Son of God" whenever Jesus healed the sick. From the Gospel of Mathew, the Messiahship of Jesus is confirmed through His healing power, something that signifies the Jews' awaiting Messiah who was to deliver them from all sicknesses. The Gospel of Mathew seems to restrict the usage of the title "Son of David" to Jesus' healing ministry as an affirmation of the Messiah who was to heal Israel.²⁶ Distinctively, Mathew uses the title "Son of David" six times in his writing, while Mark and Luke used it four times to describe Jesus. The Gospel of John only cites what was indicated in Mathew. Mathew's usage of the term was in instances when blind, lame, and mute came to Jesus for healing. In another circumstance, it was a large crowd that worshiped Him by saying Hosanna, while in one incident; children also referred to Him as the son of David. Mathew seems to be the only author who showed much interest in using the title son of David. He uses the term both positively and apologetically, to describe Jesus as the awaiting Messiah sent to deliver the Israelites. Moreover, Jesus, the son of David as a healer, not a military leader, thereby forcing Israel to reject Him. An exegete could consider two themes from Mathew's account; the first been Mathew's attraction to demonstrate Jesus' title as the son of David, and second the limited manner Mathew applies the phrase "Son of David" to the earthly Jesus.²⁷

²²Mullins, "Jesus, the Son of David." 120-121.

²³Mullins, "Jesus, the Son of David." 120-121.

²⁴Mullins, "Jesus, the Son of David." 120-121.

²⁵Mullins, "Jesus, the Son of David." 120-121.

²⁶Kingsbury, "The Title "Son of David" in Matthew's Gospel," 593-4.

²⁷Kingsbury, "The Title "Son of David" in Matthew's Gospel," 601.

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